follow what you've been feeling by reddieforlove

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)
Genre: Aged-Up Character(s), Alternate Universe - College/ University, F/M, Fluff, Language, No Lab AU, Rating May Change
Language: English
Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven, Holly Wheeler, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Max Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Ted Wheeler, Will Byers
Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler
Status: In-Progress
Published: 2018-01-17
Updated: 2018-01-17
Packaged: 2022-04-20 16:23:15
Rating: Teen And Up Audiences
Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply
Chapters: 1
Words: 4,100
Publisher: archiveofourown.org
Summary:

Mike and the others went to high school with Jane "Eleven" Hopper back in Hawkins but they ran in different circles and hardly ever interacted. Now that they all happen to be going to college in the same place, Mike doesn't expect anything to be different. Then he's brought together with El at a frat party and everything changes.

follow what you've been feeling

Author's Note:

> Title: Better With You - Of Verona
>
> This is pure, ridiculous fluff. I'm not even sure where it came from. It may develop to something else later on but for now the rating is T for the language alone.
>
> This is an AU where El was never taken by the lab so her characterization is different to reflect that. It's also all from Mike's POV so that's going to affect the view we have of her.

Over a year spent at college taught Mike Wheeler a lot of things. Some of them were useful life lessons that he almost wished he could have known before learning them the hard way. Others were useless outside of certain settings and probably wouldn't help him at all once he received his degree. One of the most useless yet somehow biggest lessons that Mike learned was that he quite simply despised huge parties no matter what format they came in.

And yet here he was, dragged by none other than Dustin to one of the biggest frat houses at their school to suffer through a night of loud music, intoxicated idiots, and smoke blown in his face by three different people. Mike hated it all, which was why he often found himself retreating to a quieter place until the others were ready to leave. At this particular party, his only options were the kitchen or outside. Since the temperature had been dropping more and more as they inched towards October, Mike decided to try his luck inside first.

His luck was shit.

His relieved sigh at the sight of an empty kitchen had barely left his lips before two people brushed past him, their voices raised in an argument. He was ready to step out and brave the cold when he realized that the girl reaching for an empty solo cup was familiar. Too familiar. Her dark curls were impossible not to recognize since he'd seen them every day for four straight years of high school. El

Hopper. Mike knew that he went to college with her too but the university campus was much larger than Hawkins High.

This was the first time they'd been anywhere near each other since graduating high school. Not that she would care, since they'd barely spoken two words to one another when they lived in Hawkins. Mike tried to pretend like he didn't care either but it turned out that even a year of not seeing her around much didn't make his crush go away. The slicked back, douchey, half drunk guy that was currently glaring down at her was definitely the type of person that caused Mike to hate everything about big parties.

"What the fuck are you doing?" the guy spat in her direction.

Mike stood frozen in place, not sure what to say or do. Did they even notice that he was there when they came barrelling past him? Should he make a graceful exit or just stay still since they didn't seem to see him? El simply scoffed, rolling her eyes as she filled the empty cup with water from the faucet.

"Give it up," she said simply, her soft voice layered with a core of steel.

"You humiliated me out there," he growled, moving in closer to grab her arm. "Are you a tease or just a fucking prude?"

Mike opened his mouth to say something, anything. He wasn't the type to get involved in confrontations but he also wasn't the type to stand by and let someone talk to anyone like that. But before he could get any words out, she spoke first.

"Neither," El said, glowering up at the frat douche before wrenching her arm from his grasp and turning away with an angry flush in her cheeks that somehow made her look even more beautiful.

Then her eyes fell on Mike and widened a little bit. His breath caught in his throat when she tilted her head to the side and looked him up and down, almost as if she was trying to place him and sizing him up all at once.

"You aren't special, you know? I could have any girl in this place,"

the guy said, still not giving it up.

“Then go get ‘em, tiger,” she said, shoving her half-drunk water in his hands before crossing the room

Mike thought she was going to leave at first but then she was right in front of him and her hand was coming up to cup the back of his neck as she pushed up on her toes. He didn’t have time to think before her lips were pressed to his, soft and warm and *real.* Shit. El Hopper was kissing him and Mike was frozen as an icicle. He tilted his head down, his hands rising hesitantly to her hips as he responded to the kiss with a little more pressure. Clearly she approved, since her fingers were suddenly delving into his hair and her nails were scraping lightly against his scalp.

Before he knew it, his hand was pressed to the small of her back and he was pulling her in close, relishing in the feeling of her smaller body pressed to his as she sighed a little into the kiss before nipping at his bottom lip and barely swiping her tongue over it to soothe the sting. Mike expected her to taste like the disgusting punch he knew was making the rounds but instead there was the slightest taste of mint as if she’d been chewing gum not long ago. It helped that she smelled sweet, like vanilla and a hint of fruit that he couldn’t identify with his mind spinning over the fact that *El fucking Hopper was kissing him.*

Then she wasn’t anymore, pulling away with her fingers still tangled in his hair. Her eyes fluttered open slowly but Mike was already staring at her in awe, wondering if this was all some elaborate dream or trick. Neither of them had noticed the guy leave the room with a red, furious expression. Neither of them really cared. El’s cheeks were still flushed but she looked much less angry, staring up at him without stepping away. Then she licked her bottom lip and Mike swallowed hard, waiting for her to say that it had been a mistake. But before she could, someone flew through the door and she jumped away from him. Mike’s hands fell heavily to his sides.

“El, please tell me that you just turned Jeremy down? He looked like someone torched his fucking hair gel collection.”

The other girl had fiery red hair that swung around in a high ponytail

and a wickedly amused grin on her face.

“Yeah, Max, I did,” El said, turning to face her while tucking her hair behind her ear. “I wanna get out of here.”

The newcomer’s eyes flitted between her and Mike suspiciously but she didn’t say anything, hooking her arm through El’s.

“There’s a burger at Benny’s with your name on it. My treat for putting that dick out with the trash where he belongs,” Max said with a snicker.

El glanced back at Mike before they left completely, a small, shy smile on her face.

“Thanks,” she mouthed at him.

All that he could do was nod, his lips still tingling from the kiss. He still wasn’t too sure what he did but it was honestly his pleasure. Mike had no idea what to do with himself once she was gone. Running a hand through his hair, he briefly considered pinching himself to make sure that he was actually awake. Then his phone buzzed in his pocket about a minute later, alerting him to a text in all-caps from Dustin.

DUDE EL HOPPER IS HERE DO YOU REMEMBER HER????

Mike couldn’t help but let out a breathless laugh.

It happened over a week later. Mike was walking across campus from the library with his mind filled with information about the midterm he was taking in the morning. Information that seemed to fade into the ether as soon as he saw El walking towards him. She was alone, her hands wrapped around the straps of her backpack and her curls escaping from a messy bun at the crown of her head. Now that he could see her more clearly in the daylight, Mike realized that she was a lot less pastel than she’d been in high school. With dark frayed jeans and a too-large faded flannel shirt over a plain black t-shirt as well as worn converse on her feet, she looked effortlessly gorgeous. Mike’s mouth went dry at the sight of her and he ducked his head as

soon as she met his eyes, part of him really hoping that she wouldn't remember or recognize him. Yet he was almost disappointed when she passed by without saying anything. Then…

"I'm sorry."

He debated not stopping, wondering if that was actually directed at him. But Mike's feet had different plans, freezing in place for just a moment before he turned around. Sure enough, she was stopped in the middle of the sidewalk and looking at him with pink cheeks.

"Me?" Mike said dumbly, even pointing at his chest like an idiot.

El nodded, taking a step towards him.

"I shouldn't have attacked you like that without asking," she said, gesturing to his face with a slender hand. "I wanted to get rid of Jeremy and I've never been the best at thinking on the spot."

"It's okay," Mike said, realizing that she was referring to the kiss. "Good, I mean. You're good. The kiss… was good."

Now he was the one blushing, inwardly cursing his own awkwardness. A small smile tugged at her lips and she looked him up and down. He hoped she didn't focus too much on the D&D shirt that he was wearing. El must not have seen anything outwardly unappealing about him because she took another few steps closer.

"Michael, right?"

His mind shorted out for a moment because *holy shit* she knew his name.

"Mike," he said without thinking.

"Mike," El repeated, his name suddenly sounding like the best thing he ever heard in her soft, musical voice. "Do you have your phone on you?"

He nodded, pulling it out of his jacket pocket and unlocking it with his thumbprint before handing it over.

“Did you forget yours? I mean, do you need to call someone?”

She shook her head, catching her lip between her teeth as he inwardly cursed his rambling mouth. With a jolt, Mike remembered that his background was a picture of him and the others at a comic convention but El didn’t seem to notice, typing something in quickly before handing it back over to him. Before he could put it back in his pocket, her hand lifted and she hooked her index finger in the collar of his shirt to tug him down. This kiss wasn’t much compared to the other, a simple brush of her lips at the corner of his mouth, but he still felt warm all over as she dropped back on her heels.

“It was a good kiss,” El agreed with his earlier babbling, stepping back with a smile. “Let’s do it again sometime.”

Mike watched her go silently, only blinking out of his reverie when she was long gone. Looking down at his phone, he unlocked it again only to see that she’d entered her phone number. Clearly it was on him to make it happen, if she really meant it.

Shit.

Mike was a big fucking chicken. He already knew that about himself but for some reason he was convinced that he might actually take advantage of the fact that El’s number was in his phone. He should have known better. Every time he picked it up to text her, his bravado failed him and he put it back down again. His friends all noticed his strange behavior, asking him a few times if he was doing all right considering that he was constantly fidgeting with his phone without actually doing anything.

He didn’t quite have the heart to tell them that he had the number of his longtime crush in his phone and still wasn’t doing anything with it. They’d either tease him into oblivion or call him a dumbass. It was better to avoid it altogether, even if he did feel a little bit guilty for keeping it all from them. They didn’t even know that he’d kissed her not once, but twice. Not that he was the one initiating it but that was just semantics. It wasn’t until they all agreed to go out to eat at the nearby diner that it all came to a head.

He vaguely remembered El and her friend agreeing to go to Benny's Diner at the party that was now over a month ago but it didn't really occur to Mike that they would be there on the exact night he decided to go with his friends. But of course, fate had long ago decided to mess with him. Mike didn't know why he looked up when the cheery bell rang over the door. People had been coming and going for the past twenty minutes and he didn't care about single one of them. But of course he would happen to lift his head just as she entered, an oversized light pink sweater casually falling off one shoulder and her hair framing her face in soft curls as she laughed at something her friend Max said.

Then El's eyes scanned the room and fell directly on Mike just as he was considering crawling under the table and refusing to resurface until she was gone. She didn't look angry or annoyed or even offended like he imagined she might. Her smile even grew and she grasped Max's arm, dragging her to the counter to order from the friendly owner who seemed to know them both quite well, crinkles forming at the corners of Benny's eyes as he scribbled out what they wanted and loudly informed them that their milkshakes would be on the house.

Mike barely heard his friends continue talking around him as he had a brief silent argument with himself. If he just ignored her after she knew that he saw her, it wouldn't just be rude. It might make it seem like he wasn't interested even though he definitely was. But on the other hand, there was a very good chance that he might embarrass himself if he just walked up to her and started talking. Dustin made up his mind for him when he finished off his Coke and nudged at Mike to let him through so that he could get it refilled.

"I'll do it," Mike said, grabbing it out of his hand.

"Thanks, man," Dustin said.

"Anytime."

He felt just a little guilty, using Dustin's drink as an excuse to walk up to the counter. But Mike had to test the waters. So he chose a stool just a few down from where El sat and just waited. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her enthusiastically conversing with Max as

she drew something on a napkin. Or maybe it wasn't a drawing because as soon as Mike handed over the cup and asked for more Coke, that same napkin was pushed down the counter towards him even though she didn't spare one glance in his direction. He carefully slid the napkin closer and read over the three neat words scrawled there.

Waiting sucks, Mike.

"Here ya go," the waitress said, handing the now full cup back over to him.

"Do you have a pen?" he asked after a moment of hesitation.

She looked at him suspiciously but handed one over from her apron anyway. Mike glanced El's way carefully and saw the slightest upturn of her lips as she listened to whatever an agitated, hand-waving Max was saying. He quickly scrawled out a response in writing that was far less neat than hers, hiding the Coke from view in case Dustin or the others glanced over and wondered why he was taking so long.

I'm sorry. I kept talking myself out of it.

He wasn't even sure that El was talking about waiting on him to text her but he took a shot in the dark and assumed she was. She turned her face toward the napkin just as Benny brought over their milkshakes and Max engaged him in a short conversation. Mike was looking at her fully this time and her eyes lifted, the briefest look of uncertainty reflecting in them before she was writing again, quickly enough that Max didn't notice before pushing the napkin back towards him.

Because you don't want to kiss me again?

Mike shook his head, his eyes widening a little as he wrote out a vehement response.

I do. I really do. I just thought it might be a joke.

She didn't look at it right away when he pushed it back over. Mike jumped a little when he heard Dustin's voice at his side.

“Why are you still sitting here?” he asked, taking his Coke from the counter.

“I, uh… ordered a piece of pie,” Mike said dumbly, unable to come up with another excuse. “They’re heating it up for me.”

“Oh cool! Can you get me a slice of the blueberry?” Dustin asked.

Mike nodded, watching him walk away before waving down the waitress again. He ordered both a slice of blueberry and apple to cover for his lie. By the time she walked away to warm up the two slices, the napkin was back in front of him again.

meet in the hall by the bathrooms - ten minutes

He crumpled the napkin and threw it away in a nearby trashcan before giving the pen back to the waitress when she came with the two slices of pie. Mike sat down and took a few bites of the pie, his eyes darting nervously to the clock over the kitchen window every once in a while. When ten minutes finally passed, he slid the rest of his pie over to Will.

“You can have that if you want,” he said, standing up. “I’ll be back.”

Mike wondered if they noticed his behavior and thought that it was strange. He tried his best to act natural as he headed back towards the bathrooms but it was hard when his heart was racing in his chest and his palms felt sweaty. Rubbing them against his jeans, he paced a little in the short hallway as he waited. It didn’t take too long for someone to round the corner but it wasn’t El but rather another customer who gave him a strange look before slipping into the women’s bathroom.

Mike sighed and leaned against the wall, shutting his eyes and telling himself that he was acting ridiculous. Maybe it was just one big joke. Maybe she was laughing with Max over how easy it was to get him to do what she wanted. Then he felt a small hand on his arm and jumped a little, his head snapping up and his eyes opening to meet her gaze. He opened his mouth to apologize but El looked amused, pressing a finger to her lips. Then she was taking his hand in hers, tugging him towards a door at the end of the hall that he missed

before. It led outside to the alley behind the diner and she kicked a brick into place to keep it open before turning to face him.

He opened his mouth, probably to embarrass himself with a ramble, but she grasped his hoodie in both hands and leaned up. Mike's hands lifted and settled on her waist to balance her as he expected the kiss But it never came. She hovered close to him and stared up into his eyes but didn't actually kiss him. Mike wasn't entirely sure what to do with that. He could hear cars racing by on the main road and a slight breeze drifted through the alley, ruffling her hair and filling his senses with her sweet, fruity perfume.

"I like kissing you, Mike," El said, her voice quiet as she stared into his eyes seriously. "That's not a joke."

Mike saw the open expression in her eyes and wondered if he might have hurt her when he wrote that.

"Why me?" he couldn't help but ask, feeling anxious about her answer.

"Why not you?" El shrugged.

He didn't really know how to respond to that. Her proximity was making it hard for him to think past the softness of her lips or the slightest hint of pink in her cheeks, but he pushed past it to focus on her answer. It was as if she didn't see anything wrong or even strange about kissing him. Like they hadn't been a part of two very different social circles in high school and even now. He hadn't changed much, other than growing tall and losing baby fat that left him with gangly limbs and high cheekbones.

Her hand lifted suddenly and her fingers delved into his hair, pushing it away from his forehead gently. Mike looked down at her with awe and uncertainty, trying his best not to show just how unlikely this entire situation was. She stared right back at him, a little crease forming between her eyebrows as she continued to stroke her fingers through his hair. It was almost as if she was trying to figure him out, as if Mike was some mystery when he felt like he was the open book and she was the puzzle.

“You get lost in your head a lot, don’t you?” El said with a small smile tugging at her lips.

“Yeah,” Mike said, knowing that she had him pegged there.

Someone outside the alley let out a shout and a plane flew overhead. He barely paid any attention to either of the noises.

“So do I,” she said.

Then she was finally kissing him and suddenly everything around him went quiet. It was just El and her lips caressing his and her fingers carding through his hair as he slid an arm around her waist and pulled her in closer. It was tentative and hungry all at once, with heat building between them and flooding their veins. Mike finally lifted one hand and cupped her chin, relishing in the softness of her skin beneath his touch. Her lips parted just a little and her head tilted to the side as her tongue tentatively swept over his bottom lip, nearly pulling a groan from deep in his chest. Then she was pulling away and letting out a giggle as her fingers lifted to touch her lips. Mike noticed for the first time, as he opened his eyes, that her nails were painted dark blue and the polish was chipping. Then he gave her a strange look and felt a little odd that she’d laughed.

“Apples,” El said, her eyes bright and her cheeks glowing as she laughed again at the realization on his face.

“I ate pie,” he confessed.

She looked like she wanted to tease him a little but instead El gave him another brief, sweet kiss before dropping back and stepping away. Mike felt disappointed when he let his hands drop but she laced her fingers through his and squeezed lightly as if she could sense it and maybe even felt it too.

“We’ve been gone a while,” she said, tilting her head towards the diner.

Mike wasn’t ashamed to admit that he’d completely forgotten about his friends. It was almost impossible that they hadn’t noticed his extended absence. But then she was turning his face back to meet his

gaze again.

“Text me this time, Mike,” El told him, tapping her finger over his lips. “I can’t do all the work here.”

With that, she kissed his cheek and turned away, walking back into the diner. He stared after her, inhaling deeply as he reached up to run his hand through his hair. Then he followed, kicking the brick out of the door to let it slam closed.

“About time. Did you get lost?” Lucas said as he reached the booth again.

They were all ready to go, donning their jackets and splitting the bill up between them.

“Sorry,” Mike said simply, somehow feeling El’s eyes on him as he put down a ten dollar bill. “I got distracted.”

It wasn’t the truth but it wasn’t a lie either. He vowed to come clean to his friends, knowing that he couldn’t keep lying by omission. He walked out with his phone in hand, waiting until he was slipping into the backseat of Dustin’s car to pull up her contact to finally text her as his heart raced in his chest.

Mike: I like kissing you too.

He stared down at his phone as a small box with three grey dots popped up.

El: About time.

Mike couldn’t agree more.

Author's Note:

> I would love to hear what you think!
>
> The next chapter might just be from El's point of view.